

In and Out of Hell

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 February 2024

Preacher: Stephen Murray

[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the book of Luke, and we're going to be in Luke chapter 16. Luke 16 and verses 19 to 31.

Luke 16 and verses 19 to 31.

Luke 16 and verses 19 to 31.

Luke 16 and verses 19 to 31.

Luke 17 and verses 19 to 31.

[2 : 21] Luke 16 and verse 19. from the dead. This is the word of the Lord. Let's ask for God's help as we study it this morning. Father and our King, we want to know truth this morning.

We want to have our heads and our hearts filled up with truth. Truth that changes. So that we leave this place not just knowing more about the Bible or about you, but believing more, feeling more, loving you more, changed by what you have done.

We ask that your Spirit would do a special work in us. It's His power that changes us as He takes the word and He puts it deep in our hearts. So we ask that you meet with us now for Christ's sake. Amen. So we're journeying with Jesus. That's what we've been doing over the last few weeks, journeying with Jesus as He heads to Jerusalem in an attempt to understand Him, understand who He is.

Oh, there's a little fly. He's probably followed me from my home. I have an infestation at home, and so this guy probably got in the car and has decided to follow along. But we've been journeying with Jesus and trying to understand who He is, trying to get a clear picture of Him in an age where people know Jesus quite a lot at a surface level, but might not actually really know what He stands for, what He says, what He teaches, who He is, and what He does and achieves.

[3 : 51] So we've been walking with Him as He goes on a journey, as He goes on a journey to the city of Jerusalem where He's actually ultimately going to face His death in the Gospel of Luke. He's on the way to the cross.

He's going to suffer there. He's going to die there. Now, according to the very rich and detailed testimony of the Bible, that death that takes place at the cross, it actually achieves all sorts of different things for the believer in Christ.

So it brings about life. It brings about forgiveness. It gives you a new identity. It unites you with Christ. But there's actually one thing that it achieves that a lot of Christians are a little bit reluctant to talk about or preach about, and that is Christ saves you from hell.

We don't like hell. We don't like to talk about it. But now, I know there are probably good reasons for why that is. I'm certain there are certain churches and groups of Christians out there in the past, in the present, who just beat that kind of hell drum every single Sunday and make it sound like the Gospel.

All the Gospel really amounts to is fire insurance, that you've just got to get out. That's all there is to Christianity. So I understand that sort of criticism. I also understand that hell's a very difficult concept to get our hearts around emotionally.

[5 : 10] In fact, if you don't think that, then I don't think you've looked carefully at what the Bible actually says about this subject. It's incredibly hard, emotionally and psychologically, to wrestle with the existence of this place called hell.

So I understand that hell is a difficult topic for those sorts of reasons. The problem that you and I have is this. Hell is actually in the Bible.

And perhaps an even bigger problem than this is that hell is a topic that's actually often on the lips of Jesus himself. So we have to deal with it. If we want to know who Jesus is, what he's about, what he stands for, then we have to deal with the subject of hell.

If we want to take him seriously, we have to deal with hell. So here's what I want to do this morning. Look at this passage about the judgment after death and try and answer two questions for you. Number one, how do you get into hell? And number two, how do you stay out of hell? I think those are probably the most two important questions we need to answer about hell. Now I want to actually give a little bit of credit where credit is due as we start this sermon.

[6 : 14] So a lot of what I'm going to say this morning is actually informed by Timothy Keller's apologetic work, *The Reason for God*, a book that he wrote more than a decade ago now, particularly his chapter on the subject of hell in that book.

And he in turn is actually indebted to thinkers like C.S. Lewis and the Anglican theologian J.R. Packer. So my arguments and really his arguments are not new or novel here. But I just want to give you that caveat as we go in here.

There's not a lot of original thinking in this. Very, really is anyway. But here's the real rub, I think, as we think about this subject. If hell is real, and I think it is, and the Bible's pretty set on this, then I don't want to go there.

I don't want to go there. I don't want others to go there. And you shouldn't want to go there. And you shouldn't want others to go there. Now even atheists actually agree with that logic.

Whether they believe in hell or not, they actually agree with the logic. So there's a well-known magician comedian by the name of Penn Jillette. Penn Jillette. And on one occasion, a very, very respectful gentleman came up to him at the end of one of his shows and handed him a Bible and said, Look, I really enjoyed this show.

[7 : 32] I've written in the inside cover of this Bible. Please read it. Penn Jillette got onto his YouTube channel and he said this.

He said, He was kind. He was nice. He was sane. He looked me in the eyes and he talked to me. And then he gave me this Bible. I've always said, I don't respect people who don't proselytize. That is, make converts. I don't respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and a hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever you think it is, and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize?

How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them? If I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it, that that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point that I tackle you.

And this is more important than that. This guy was a really good guy. He was polite, honest, and sane, and he cared enough about me to proselytize and give me a Bible. That's an atheist speaking.

[8 : 40] If hell is real, we need to face the reality because it is a massive issue. And we need to be clear about how one ends up there or how one doesn't, I think.

Now Jesus gives us insight into these two questions in the parable that he tells you, Luke 16, 19 to 31. Parable of Lazarus and the rich man. So here's the first one. How do you get into hell?

Parable, you'll see, traces the lives of two people. In scene one, you've kind of got their earthly lives. Then they die. And in scene two, you see their lives on the other side of the grave.

And you'll notice that the two people are contrasted throughout the parable always. So first we get the rich man who, according to the text, is actually, he's not rich. He's filthy, filthy rich.

He's not like upper middle class. He's not upper Rondebosch. He's like the highest road in Clifton. And that's just his holiday home. That kind of rich. In contrast, the other character, Lazarus, he's dirt poor.

[9 : 44] He has nothing. In fact, he has less than nothing. He has sores. He's desperately, desperately hungry. So hungry that he wants to go sit where the dogs are so he can eat the scraps off the rich man's table and the dogs come and in turn to heap insult and injury lick his sores.

But they both die and they both pass on to the next life. Lazarus is taken to, by the angels, to Abraham's side or the older translations say Abraham's bosom.

It kind of paints this image of him reclining against the chest area of the great patriarch of the nation of Israel. And the way that in the ancient New East, if you were at an intimate dinner, you would recline against your friend's head.

You see that in the Last Supper with the disciples and Jesus. The rich man on the other hand, he's in Hades. Now Hades is not exactly the same as hell. It seems to be something of the intermediate

state en route to final judgment.

We actually did a series a number of years ago on heaven and hell. It might still be out there on the website somewhere. You can listen to a more detailed explanation of what hell is exactly there and the difference between Hades and hell. But it is this fixed, this fixed place en route to a final judgment.

[10:55] There's a fixedness of the two eternal destinies. The rich man can't go to where Lazarus is and Lazarus can't go to where the rich man is. You see that, verse 26. Now here's the big burning question, excuse the pun.

Why does the rich man end up in this hell type of place? Listen to the conversation that he has with Abraham. Verse 24.

Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I'm in agony in this fire. But Abraham replied, son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things while Lazarus received bad things.

But now he's comforted here and you are in agony. So Abraham's reasoning is that the rich man in his life, he received his good things.

Now he's surely, surely, think here for a second because we know what the rest of the Bible says about this. He's surely not saying that this man is in hell because he has a lot of expensive stuff.

He's not in hell because he's rich. There are several examples of godly rich people in the Bible.

[12:04] Abraham is saying he is in hell because he got what he wanted. He got his good things.

He got the good things that he wanted. By implication, and we talked about this last week, we touched on it last week, he gets hell because hell is the one place where he won't get what he doesn't want and what he's actually never ever wanted in this life.

Now you see it in the text. So writers and commentators looked at this text and they looked at the parable and they noticed this is the only parable out of all of Jesus' parables where Jesus gives one of the characters a name.

He names the beggar, Lazarus. And so they looked at this and they went, well that's a little bit strange because the rich man doesn't get named. Abraham is named, Lazarus is named, what about the rich guy?

And it's really interesting because Lazarus' name literally means God has helped. It's the Hebrew Eliezer. God has helped. Now why does Jesus then give this beggar, this God-centered identity and he gives no identity to the rich man?

It's a nameless person. Remember names in ancient culture are hugely, hugely important in terms of the shaping of who you are as a person, your character. And so you've got to say, well is it not possible then that the rich guy has built his identity, his name, on something other than God.

[13:30] This rich man, he's given his life to the pursuit of wealth and the flaunting of that wealth. So purple robes, purple robes are reserved for kings.

As I understand, in the ancient world you had to get, to get the purple dyer, you had to get it out of these tiny little shell sea fish things, which means you had to physically, one by one, squeeze them, which means you've got to squeeze a lot of these tiny little poor shell fish to make robes to fill out this guy's wardrobe.

The Greek word there for fine linen that you see in verse 19 is actually referring to very, very expensive, delicate material that was used for incredibly fancy undergarments. So this guy has underwear that is fancier than the clothes that you wear on the outside at the best events that you go to.

He lived in luxury every single day wearing his purple, flaunting it every single day. He was uber wealthy. And yet all the while there is this saw-covered beggar at his gate.

Now I think the point that Abraham is trying to convey to the rich man is that in life he wanted stuff. He wanted it and he got it.

[14:40] He wanted a life built on wealth and he got it. He wanted an identity built on riches and he got it. What he didn't want was an identity, was a life built on God. He didn't want that and so he doesn't get it.

It's a pretty big actual contextual evidence that we don't have time to look at this morning that this is what Jesus means here because this whole section actually comes in a broader section where Jesus is chastising the religious leaders, the Pharisees, for being consumed with money and wealth.

Earlier on in the same chapter, verse 13, Jesus says, no one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one or love the other or you will be devoted to one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money. The rich man is in hell because he served a small g God other than the capital G God.

He gave his allegiance to a master other than God. He built his identity on a substance other than God. He wanted that and not God and so God gave him what he wanted.

[15:49] Here's J.R. Packer, the Anglican theologian. We looked at a longer quote of his last week but here's a shorter one on a similar subject. He says, Scripture sees hell as self-chosen. Hell appears as God's gesture of respect for human choice.

All receive what they actually choose, either to be with God forever worshipping him or without God forever worshipping themselves. And just like we actually saw last week, the rich man is not particularly repentant about that reality.

He's not concerned that his identity is not built on God because look at how he behaves in hell. He actually makes no plea. Did you notice? No plea to get out. There's no, what have I done? Please get me out of here. He actually wants to get Lazarus in.

Did you see that? He wants relief. He wants comfort. He treats Lazarus like a slave, like he would have in the previous life. Hey Abraham, that guy next to you, can you please just send him down here to dip his finger in some water and put it on my tongue so I can get some relief.

Even the request that he makes at the end there about his family and his brothers, a lot of commentators think that's not really a request made out of compassion and desire to see his family saved. It's actually a kind of a veiled dig at Abraham saying, you really actually didn't give me enough information.

[17:02] The reason I'm here is because you failed to give me enough information about the situation. He's not repentant. He is self-centered right on into eternity. How do you get into hell?

Well, you build a life on anything other than God. Here's how C.S. Lewis explains this. Christian writer C.S. Lewis wrote, Christianity asserts that we are going to go on forever.

That must either be true or false. Now there are a good many things that wouldn't be worth bothering about if I was only going to live 80 years or so but I'd better bother about if I'm going to go on living forever. Perhaps my bad temper or my jealousy are getting worse so gradually that the increase in my lifetime will not be very noticeable but it might be absolute hell in a million years.

In fact, if Christianity is true, hell is precisely the correct technical term for it. Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others but you are still distinct from it.

You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it but there may come a day when you can no longer do so and then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or to even enjoy the mood but just the grumble itself going on and on forever like a machine.

[18:23] It's not a question of God sending us to hell. In every one of us there is something growing which will be hell unless it is nipped in the bud. Friends, I would not be a good minister.

I would not be a good friend. I would certainly, certainly, certainly not be loving if I didn't stand in front of you from time to time and warn you that a life built on worshipping money or status or career or prestige or pleasure or romance or family or anything, even a good thing, a life built on worshipping any of those things, any of those things other than God has the potential to send you to hell.

And so my very simple question for you this morning is what are you worshipping now? What are you worshipping now? What are you building your identity on now? What is your true master right now?

And the easiest way to kind of honestly answer those questions for yourself is to look at your behaviour and your hopes, your dreams, your fears. Look at those things.

What does your present behaviour say about who your ultimate master is? Does it say God or does it say something else? What do your ultimate hopes and dreams for your life betray about who you actually worship?

[19:52] What are your fears suggest is most dear to your heart and your sense of self? Friends, if you want to avoid hell then you have to, have to, have to seriously ask yourself those questions.

And then you have to answer them honestly for yourself. I mean, it's a little intriguing actually that we get an expose of the man's undergarments. He's the only person who gets to see those parts.

Only he knows that his underwear costs more than the most expensive piece of clothing in most people's wardrobes. It's like we're getting an insight into his inner person there at that moment. Who he is when he's really uncovered.

And so the question is, well, who are you when you are really uncovered? if you want to avoid hell, you need to answer that question for yourself.

Here's the second point. How do you stay out of hell? Have a look at the last part of the discussion between Abraham and the rich man. Look at verse 27. He answered, then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my family for I have five brothers.

[21 : 07] Let him warn them so that they will not come to this place of torment. Abraham replied, they have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them. No, Father Abraham, he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.

He said to them, if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. Notice how the rich man tries a few things here. So first of all, he calls Abraham father.

It's likely some sort of last gasp attempt to appeal to his nationality. I'm Jewish. That's got to count for something, right? But it doesn't seem to stop him from going to hell.

Secondly, he calls for a miracle. Please send someone to my family. Send Lazarus, a dead man, from the grave. But that won't work either, according to Abraham. And so you say, well, Abraham, what will work?

And he says, listening to Moses and the prophets. It's not a band. Listening to Moses and the prophets. Without Moses and the prophets, even if a man rises from the dead, you will not believe.

[22 : 15] Now, Moses and the prophets, what it actually is, it's a shorthand way that the New Testament refers to the Old Testament, the books of Moses and the prophetic writings, which is the Bible they have at the time.

When Jesus tells us, there's no New Testament yet. So that is your Bible. Moses and the prophets is the Bible. So really, Jesus is saying, if you don't believe the word of God, if you don't believe the Bible, nothing is going to convince you of final judgment and the need to be saved, not even a miracle.

People like to sit and say, I don't know about this Christianity, but if I had a miracle, then I'd be 100% certain. The Bible itself says that's not going to change. Jesus' words in this parable actually proved true later on in Luke's gospel.

Chapter 24, at this point of the story, Jesus has now died and he's risen again and he's on a road to a town called Emmaus and he meets two downcast disciples and for whatever reason, the text doesn't exactly tell us why, they are kept from recognizing him and his true identity.

And so he comes up alongside them and he starts walking and he starts talking with them. The passage goes like this, he asked them, what are you discussing together as you walk along? And they stood still, their faces downcast.

[23 : 29] One of them named Cleopas asked him, are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? Or what things, he asked. About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied.

He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

And what's more, it's the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went into the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and they told us they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive.

And then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the woman had said, but they did not see Jesus. So these guys have got the miracle. The angels, no dead body to be found, they've got multiple witnesses, they've got the miracle, but they don't believe.

And so the story continues. Jesus said to them, how foolish you are and slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?

[24 : 39] And beginning with Moses and the prophets, says that shorthand phrase again, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. So really what they get is they get the Bible study of Bible studies, personalized Bible study from Jesus right here.

That's better than anything Graham's ever going to produce for our study groups. And no offense to Graham, but it just is better. They get a personalized Bible study from Jesus walking along this road. He takes the entire Old Testament and he teaches them about himself from the Old Testament.

Here is their response. When they finally realize that it's the resurrected Messiah who is walking with them, talking to them, they say this, they say we're not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us.

We're not our hearts burning within us as he opened the Bible to us. Friends, this is why here at the Union Chapel we do the rather repetitive, mundane, seemingly non-miraculous work of teaching the Bible Sunday in and Sunday out.

It's why we stress that you join something like a city group or our Sunday seminars in the evening, on Sunday evenings where you along with others will sit and study the Bible week in and week out. It's why we stress that you read the Bible for yourselves week in and week out.

[26 : 00] because the word of God, the Bible, will save you from hell. Why will it save you?

Because it's all about Jesus. Your whole Old Testament, Jesus says to these two on the road to a mass, it's all about me. Your New Testament, the first four books are the gospels of Jesus, the life stories of Jesus, the rest of the letters are all the apostles reflecting back on the significance and the meaning of Jesus.

It's all about Jesus from start to finish. There is a focus, there is a point, there is a governing theme to Scripture and it is Jesus. These two men on the road, their hearts are not burning within them because they've just got a theology download.

Now they know how the Hebrew syntax works better in the Old Testament. They are not theological geeks and nerds just geeking out and having a technical Bible study, wrestling with some controversial theological topics.

their hearts are burning within them because they've seen Jesus clearly for the first time. And they've seen that they're building their identities on something other than God, but that Jesus through his life and his death and his resurrection has come to give them a new identity.

[27 : 14] They've seen who they really are and they've seen that they desperately desperately need this Jesus of the Bible. See friends, do you think if you can build your career, then you'll really be worth something, you just find the right romantic partner, then your life will be truly fulfilling, the right person to marry.

You think if you can just accumulate a little bit more wealth, then you'll be content and you'll be comfortable? Those are the lies of the rich man. Those are the lies that ultimately send you to hell. You need Jesus in the Bible to show you who you really are. Martin Luther, the great German reformer, his last words on his deathbed were reportedly, we are all beggars.

We are all beggars. You see, when you take this parable, this original parable, and you put it within the context of the whole Bible storyline, you see the truth of that statement.

You see that we are all actually beggars. We're all actually Lazarus, lying at the gates, covered in the sores of our sin, settling for the scraps that the dogs eat, in our expectations, in our hopes, in our dreams for this life.

[28 : 41] That's who we really are. Like Lazarus' name suggests, we need God to be our helper, to shake us out of this situation. salvation. And in Christ Jesus, he has been our helper.

Jesus Christ has covered the broken sores of our sin with his own broken body. He has stripped us of our spiritual poverty by giving up his heavenly riches.

He has lifted us up with angels by being beaten down by evil men. We get to nestle in the bosom of the Father because he was momentarily cut off from his Father when he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

In Jesus Christ, God has been our Eleazar. God has been our helper. That is the testimony of the Bible. If you will not believe that testimony of the Bible, if you will not believe Moses and the prophets, then no other miracle is going to save you from hell.

Nothing else is going to convince you. That's what Abraham says. John Wesley, great 18th century evangelist and the founder of the Methodist church.

[29 : 51] He wrote, I'm a creature of a day. I'm a spirit come from God and returning to God. I want to know one thing, the way to heaven.

God himself has condescended to teach me the way. He has written it down in a book. Oh, give me that book at any price. Give me the book of God.

Let me be a man of one book. friends, when I read that book and I've spent my entire, most of my adult life professionally studying this book, I come to two conclusions about hell.

Number one, hell is terrible, terrifyingly terrible. The rich man describes it as torment. number two, God emphatically does not want any of us to go there.

And you say, well, how do I know that? His son leading out on a cross is a grotesque yet incredibly moving historical reality that screams out to all of us that God is absolutely committed to the point of immense pain to making sure that we don't end up there.

[31 : 15] And so when you know that, that he's done that for you, what are you going to build your life on? Will you remain nameless? Or will you have an identity like Lazarus?

God is my helper. Let's pray together. My Lord, my Savior, help us, Father.

Help us to steer clear of a tragedy, tragedy, tragedy, tragedy, of a life built on something other than you.

Help us to steer clear of that, Lord. Help us to see the horror of it, what it actually is. Protect us, Father.

Let us see the ways right now that we are building our identity on something other than you. Let us see the ways that we are pursuing wealth or status or prestige or comfort or pleasure or romance or power in ways that dethrone you and take you away from being our central identity.

[32 : 19] Let us see that, Lord, and let us see Jesus Christ clearly with the eyes of our heart so that we will realize that there's really nothing else to pursue in this life other than Christ. Help us, Father, strengthen us to do that very thing.

And I pray for any person sitting here this morning who's never repented and trusted in Jesus, Lord. I don't really believe that we should spend a lot of time kind of doing scare tactics and say, oh, come to Jesus because this terrible thing is going to happen to you.

But I do think there should be sober warning, Lord, because the Bible has sober warning. And it says if you pick a reality apart from Christ, you will end up with a reality apart from Christ.

And so I pray for any person who's sitting here this morning who's not a believer, that they would repent this morning and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior. Father, help us in this, Lord.

Help us to be a church that is faithful in proclaiming the saving gospel. We ask this all for Christ's sake and his glory. Amen.